

APPLAUSE, APPLAUSE

Creating Your Own Gym Show to Enhance Business Success

By Paula R. Lord, PMA-CPT

Hosting an end-of-year (or end-of-session or end-of-season) program for your clients is a great tool for fostering positive relationships in your business. Your coaches get to see their students perform and find out what they can really do; your kids get to have a tangible goal and non-threatening environment in which to show what they have learned; and your parents get to see a finished product at consistent intervals.

Presented here is just one approach to staging an end-of-year program. This approach follows the recital model used by dance studios and Gymnastics for All programs. Including a program like this will bring revenue-producing opportunities to your business in the following ways:

PARTICIPATION FEE

- Fee may be included into session tuition for all clients
- Additional fee may be charged just for those participating
- Special leotards may be sold specifically to be worn in the program

NEW STUDENT/RETENTION

- New clients will hear about your programs and come to try it out
- Old clients will be retained because of the great time they have on program days

It may be encouraging to know that you can create a program like this in as short as an eight-week session. Just follow this simple timeline:

- **WEEK # 1**
 - Coaches brainstorm session to choose music and create routines
- **WEEKS # 2 & 3**
 - Include pieces of the choreography as part of the warm-up and practice specific skills
- **WEEKS # 4 & 5**
 - Put together longer sections of choreography and skill sets with music
- **WEEKS # 5 & 6**
 - Put together the full routine once without music and once with music each practice

- **WEEK # 7**
 - Practice the routine as if it were an actual performance, including march in and out
- **WEEK # 8**
 - Program week!

The key will be in the smart creation of the routines. Use the KISS method and Keep It Simple Silly!

HOW TO PUT TOGETHER AN END-OF-YEAR PROGRAM RECITAL

This type of program will feature a series of group gymnastics routines performed to music on the floor exercise area. Routines can include 20–40 kids of similar ages and abilities all performing together. This does not require a lot of rehearsal time, if the choreography is created properly. Classes of the same level and age learn the simple routine during their regularly scheduled meeting times, and then come together for one rehearsal just to be placed on the floor.

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Practice of the routine should not require more than 10 minutes of class time and could be used as a warm-up or ending activity.

If you have specialty groups in your business, let this be a chance for them to show off a little bit. Create fun numbers for your competitive teams, and let them share in the creative process. Put together a Gymnastics for All group that meets separately for an additional evening of training and have them become the hosts of the program. Meeting outside of regularly scheduled training hours will allow you to create extra routines that can follow the theme of your show, and this group can become the ambassadors for your business out in the community (appearing at local high school sporting events, art festivals, and more).

SO HOW DO YOU PULL THIS OFF?

- Take stock of the classes you have going on — don't try to create new classes just so you can have a show.
- Map out or chart the number of students you have by levels/ages/abilities, and try to fit them into six basic routines.

- **Example 1 (all levels gymnastics school):**
 - Pre-School classes
 - 4–5 year old classes
 - Level 1 & 2 morning classes
 - Level 1 & 2 evening classes
 - Level 3 classes
 - Level 4+ classes
- **Example 2 (pre-school only facility):**
 - Play with Me
 - 3 year olds – morning
 - 3 year olds – afternoon
 - 4 year olds
 - 5 year olds
- **Specialty Groups**
 - Competitive Teams Levels
 - Cheer classes
 - Tumbling classes
 - Rhythmic classes
 - Acrobatics classes
 - Gymnastics for All Team

1. Select music.

Music selection is one of the most critical parts of the process. The selections should be age appropriate, 2-3 minutes in length, and something to which the students can relate. This is also an opportunity for music education, which would be a sellable added value for your business. Think about centering your

show around a fun theme to help narrow your search for music, like "Only the Classics" — select classical music pieces, maybe finding some that have been reworked with a rock and roll flavor or new interesting rhythms; "Our Favorite Decade" — select music from the roaring 20s, psychedelic 70s, or do a walkthrough history; or "Movie Music" — bring out the best music from your favorite films.

2. Create the routines.

Most important is that the routines you create are easy for the instructors to teach in a very short amount of time. After all, your job is to teach gymnastics skills, not to compete with the amazing choreography learning skills of the dance students down the road. In other words, if the gymnasts are able to follow the routine but need assistance remembering what comes next, that would be very appropriate. The gymnastics skills must be able to be performed safely in the context of the routine, so coaching to avoid confusion in the group would be a good idea.

Some tips for KISS (Keep it Simple) choreography:

- Use a simple doors/windows line formation for younger or less experienced students. This also works well when the number of students participating may be unknown. Relying on partners or exact positions of others can cause problems when groups practice separately but come together for the performance.
- Utilize shapes or carpet squares to show where lines should begin and end. Including these markers from the first introduction of the routine will speed up the spatial learning.
- Include only skills that are easily performed by the group. This is not the time to use the new back walkover or handspring. Cartwheels, rolls, round-offs, and handstands can be varied in hundreds of ways and linked with dance skills.
- Don't be afraid to include repeating sections of choreography. If your music choice has a chorus, which repeats throughout the song, try doing the same choreography

each time with maybe a different formation. Then, fill in the verses with different skill series.

- Streaming tumbling or springboard work is a great way to have your students show their skills in a quick manner. Try getting in lines of 6–8 gymnasts and perform a series of rolls, cartwheels or back handsprings one after another in rapid fire style. It takes discipline on the part of the athletes to keep moving and to truly have control of their skills. It's a great crowd pleaser and looks great with fast, exciting music.

3. Define your gym's movement vocabulary and use it.

A movement vocabulary is a list of skills and gymnastics movements that you expect every student in your facility to know and master. It is also about having a signature start and finish position, which may be as simple as a beautiful salute. Having a movement vocabulary will give your program a visual identity and can serve as a way to make your program cohesive. If you don't already have a well-defined vocabulary, this would be a good time to create it!

Once you have the basic routines set, go back and make sure each piece is demonstrating a progression of skills as it relates to your gym's curriculum. Look at all the disciplines you are teaching within your facility and make sure they are represented appropriately. A well-rounded program will probably show basic skill progressions in tumbling, dance, strength and vault skills.

4. Add some spice and fun elements.

Adding elements from the bigger world of Gymnastics for All is another great educational opportunity for your business to add value and fun. Take some time for continuing education with your coaches by including rhythmic apparatus, acrobatic partner skills, or ballroom dance into your routines. The possibilities are unlimited, so think outside the box and have a great time!

*Paula is the owner of GymRoots, Inc., an organization for support of Gymnastics for All programs, and author of **Perfect 10 Posture**, a body preparation program for gymnasts.*

